



Research Memorandum

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WEST EUROPEAN PUBLICS PESSIMISTIC ON INF ARMS CONTROL TALKS

This report presents findings from USIA-commissioned national public opinion surveys conducted between October 8 and 30 in Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Personal interviews with about 1000 adults were conducted in each country by reputable firms--mostly Gallup affiliates. They were completed before the death of Leonid Brezhnev and after the change of government in West Germany.

Summary:

Surveys taken shortly after the resumption of INF talks show that:

- o Large proportions of the European publics remain unaware of the ongoing INF talks. Unawareness of the Soviet INF monopoly is even more widespread and is most extensive in West Germany.
- o West European publics generally are skeptical and pessimistic about U.S.-USSR arms control efforts. Many believe that both sides are using INF negotiations to strengthen their own position in the nuclear arms race.
- o Against this background of unawareness and skepticism, opposition to INF deployment--even when linked to arms talks--continues to be extensive, and has increased in recent months in West Germany, Italy, and France.
- o On arms control issues, Europeans' perceptions of the Soviet Union are more negative than their views of the U.S.
- o Consistent with this, the zero-option proposal is preferred widely over the Brezhnev freeze plan as the INF proposal "more likely to prevent war."

End Summary

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Publics Generally Not Well Informed About INF

Despite extensive official and media commentary, a large part of European publics continues to be unaware that INF talks are underway. Sizable proportions--ranging from one-third in the Netherlands to a two-thirds majority in Britain--are unaware or misinformed about the talks. In West Germany and France, about as many know of them as do not. Only in the Netherlands--with its highly visible activist anti-nuclear protests--does a majority (67%) say they are aware of INF talks.

Still more widespread is the lack of awareness that the Soviets have an INF monopoly. While most West Europeans (between 70% and 85%) know that the USSR has nuclear missiles capable of hitting Western Europe, nearly as many (between 64% in the Netherlands and 83% in the FRG) do not know, or, more significantly, are misinformed, that NATO has no comparable missiles stationed in their countries.

The high level of unawareness about the INF missile imbalance generally has not changed over the past 15 months.

Skepticism Over Sincerity in Arms Talks is Widespread

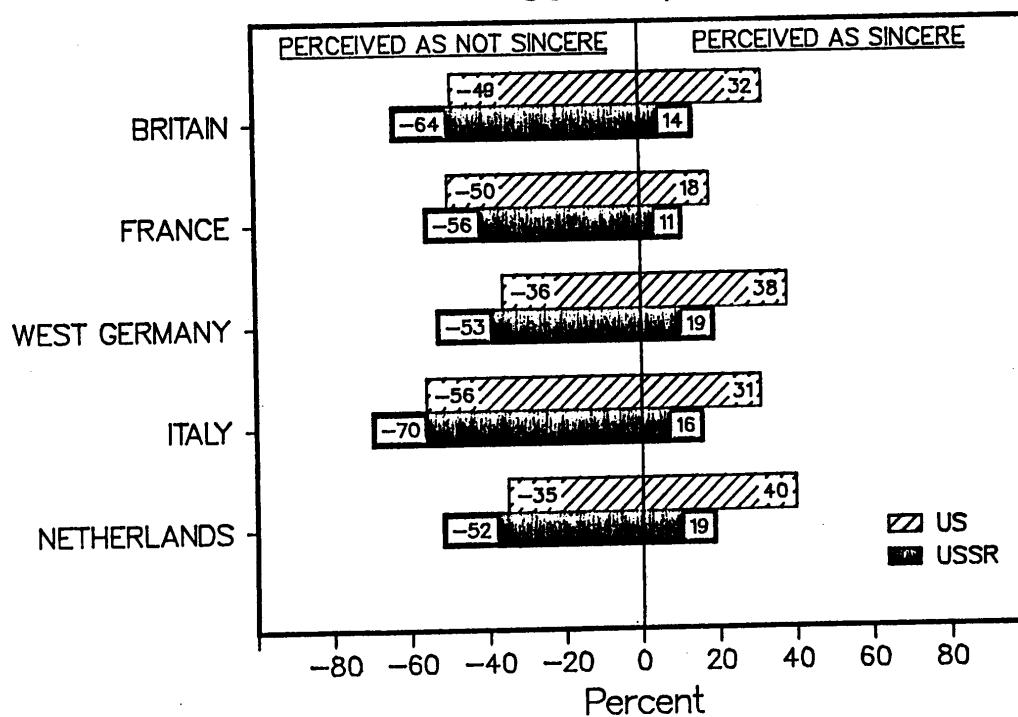
West European publics widely question the sincerity of both the U.S. and the USSR in seeking nuclear arms reductions:

- o A majority in Italy (56%-to-31%) and large pluralities in Britain (49%-to-32%) and France (50%-to-18%) believe the U.S. "is not making a genuine effort to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union that would reduce the number of nuclear weapons on both sides."
- o In West Germany and the Netherlands, opinion on this score is about evenly divided (Figure 1).

Views of Soviet sincerity in seeking arms control are more widely negative, with between 52 percent and 70 percent in all countries believing Moscow is not seriously trying to reach a nuclear arms reduction agreement with the U.S.

Doubts about the sincerity of both superpowers--but particularly of the U.S.--appear to have spread in recent months. A July 1982 survey, using a comparable question, showed that, except in France and Italy, majorities (53%-to-59%) thought then that the U.S. was "making a genuine effort to reach a serious arms reduction agreement with the USSR." French and Italian opinion divided.

FIGURE 1
ARMS CONTROL SINCERITY OF U.S. AND USSR:
OCTOBER, 1982



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INF Arms Control Goals Questioned

In keeping with these views, sizable proportions of European publics agree with statements asserting that the U.S. and USSR are using the INF negotiations to pursue goals other than arms control. For the U.S.:

- o In Italy, Britain, and France, pluralities (40%-50% range) agree that "the major goal of the U.S. in negotiations is to stall for time in order to build up its nuclear forces in Western Europe."
- o In West Germany, however, a 54-to-42 percent majority disagrees with this assessment of U.S. motives.
- o In the Netherlands, opinion is roughly divided between those who agree (27%) and those who disagree (32%), but the largest proportion (42%) express no view on the issue.

For the USSR, doubts are more widespread than for the U.S., which is consistent with other comparative assessments of the two superpowers. Pluralities in the Netherlands (40%) and France (48%) and two-thirds majorities in the other three countries agree that the main Soviet goal in INF negotiations "is to keep all of its own nuclear forces while preventing the U.S. from building up its nuclear strength in Western Europe."

Pessimism Over INF Talks Remains Widespread

Given the extensive doubts about the motives underlying the superpowers' INF negotiations, West European publics generally continue to be pessimistic over the outcome of the INF talks. Sizable majorities (from 57% in France to 72% in Britain) say an agreement to limit medium-range missiles is unlikely by this time next year. Only about one in ten are optimistic.

Pessimism about the likely success of the INF talks has increased in France and particularly in the UK (19%) since the Geneva talks began last year.

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Zero-Option Favored Over Soviet Freeze Proposal

Of the INF talks proposals made public last year by both sides, majorities or pluralities continue to consider President Reagan's zero-option proposal as "more likely to prevent war" than the Brezhnev freeze plan (Figure 2).*

- o Majorities in West Germany (60%-to-30%) and Italy (66%-to-25%) and a near majority in the UK (49%-to-23%) place their confidence in the zero-option over the Brezhnev proposal to have the USSR "stop adding to its nuclear missiles in European Russia if the U.S. agrees not to station any new nuclear missiles in Western Europe."
- o In the Netherlands, uncertainty prevails (52%). Among the rest, the U.S. proposal is preferred by a 35-to-13 percent margin.

Since last spring, support for the zero-option has declined by about 10 percent in both Britain and Italy but without a corresponding gain registered by the Brezhnev plan.

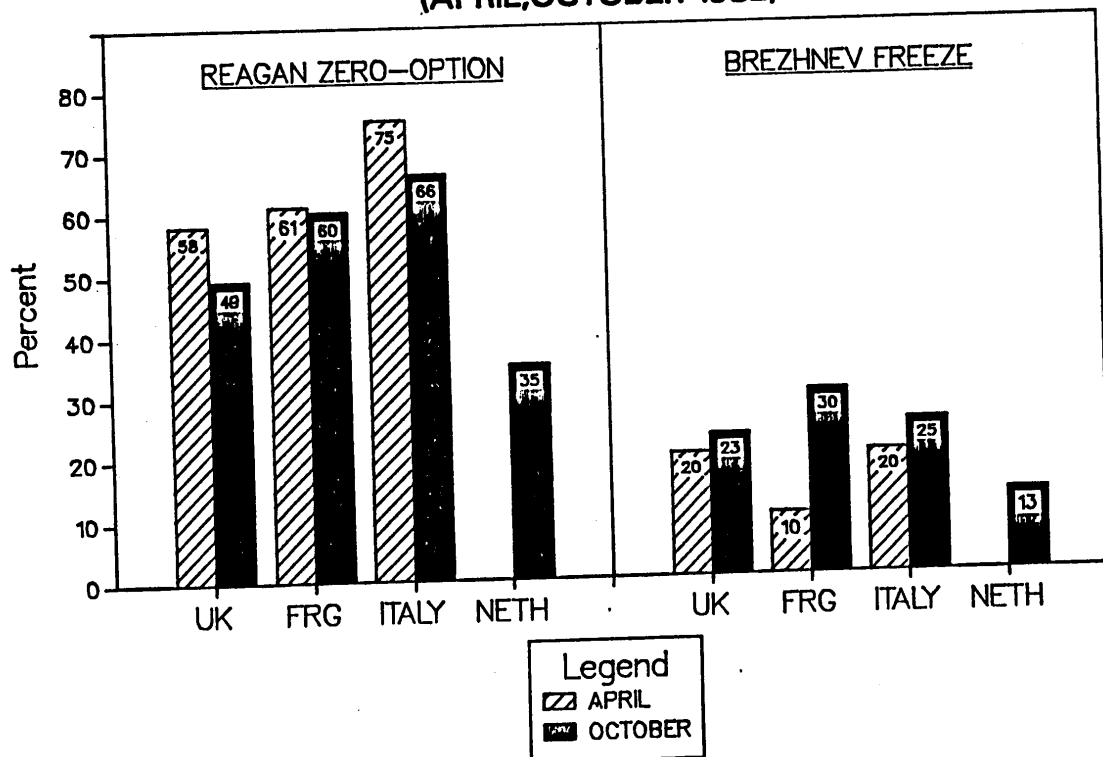
In a climate of general skepticism, President Reagan's proposal is seen as "a sincere effort to reduce nuclear weapons" by narrow pluralities in Italy (45%-to-36%), Britain (49%-to-37%), and West Germany (39%-to-32%). By contrast, a similar 39-to-31 percent plurality of the French believe the zero-option is not sincere. Opinion divides evenly in the Netherlands.

Since last spring, credibility of the zero-option has eroded significantly in West Germany (19%), and to a lesser extent in France and Italy (10%).

Nonetheless, Brezhnev's plan gets much lower marks; it is disbelieved by sizable proportions (45%-55% range). At most, only one-quarter (in Britain) of West European publics believe the Soviet proposal is credible.

* France is not included in these findings because of extreme unstableness in the results from April to October.

FIGURE 2
INF PROPOSAL MOST LIKELY TO PREVENT WAR:
REAGAN ZERO-OPTION AND BREZHNEV FREEZE
(APRIL, OCTOBER 1982)



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Support for INF Deployment Declines

The public opinion climate for actual INF deployment appears to have worsened somewhat since last summer. Now, only in Britain are there more supporters of INF stationing than opponents, but mostly only with conditions attached. In Italy, a majority now is unconditionally opposed to INF deployment. In the Netherlands and West Germany, opinion is divided.

SUPPORT/OPPOSITION FOR INF DEPLOYMENT
October 1982

	<u>West Germany</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>Nether- lands</u>	<u>France</u>
Unconditional Opposition	<u>42%</u>	<u>59%</u>	39%	<u>42%</u>	41%
Conditional Acceptance*	37	28	38	33	27
Unconditional Acceptance	6	8	13	5	7

* Conditional accepters include those who "would accept" INF deployment "only if arms talks with the USSR have failed" or "as long as there are arms control negotiations with the USSR at the same time."

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In the three major continental countries, this apparently represents a rise in opposition and corresponding drop in conditional acceptance since last summer (Figure 3).^{*} Then, West Germans were more likely than not to say they "would accept" INF if linked to arms talks. Now, they are divided.

Also last summer, Italian opinion divided evenly, but now opposition is most widespread here. And in France, opposition now prevails for the first time since the question was asked in July 1981.

Mixed Views on INF as Deterrent

Paralleling the drop in support for INF deployment in West Germany and Italy is a decline in the belief that stationing would prevent rather than invite a Soviet attack. In both countries, opinion is now split on this score, while last July belief in the deterrent value of INF prevailed.

In the Netherlands, the plurality (45%) is unsure whether or not INF risks or prevents war. However, in the UK and France, the deterrent view prevails by two to one margins.

* Negative changes since last summer in opinion on INF deployment may be exaggerated to some degree because of the effect of information on INF incorporated in the questions. In the July survey, people were given information about the Soviet INF monopoly and then asked their opinion on stationing when linked to talks. No such information was provided in the October survey.

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